DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 823 CG 032 392

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TITLE	Improving the Effectiveness of Schools within a Multi-Agency Strategy for Protecting Children.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	42p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agency Cooperation; Child Safety; *Child Welfare; *Educational Cooperation; Foreign Countries; Government Role; *School Effectiveness; *Social Services
IDENTIFIERS	*Children Act 1989 (Great Britain); England

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the policy background, the arguments for collaboration between agencies, the barriers which may get in the way of schools and social services working together to safeguard children, and suggestions for how these can be removed. As well as drawing on policy documents and literature around child protection, education and collaboration, and a recent survey of local education authorities' response to their responsibilities in relation to child protection, it is also based on research conducted in three authorities in England. (Contains 50 references.) (GCP)

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Improving the effectiveness of schools within a multi-agency strategy for protecting children

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Paper presented by Mary Baginsky, NSPCC at the 84th Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 2003

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Improving the effectiveness of schools within a multi-agency strategy for protecting children

"For every complex problem, there is a solution that is short, simple, and wrong."

H. L. Menkin (1880-1956)

This paper will explore the policy background, the arguments for collaboration between agencies, the barriers which may get in the way of schools and social services working together to safeguard children, and suggestions for how these can be removed. As well as drawing on policy documents and literature around child protection, education and collaboration, and a recent survey of local education authorities' response to their responsibilities in relation to child protection (Baginsky, 2003a), it is also based on research conducted in three authorities in England - two cities (City A and City B) and a large county council . The author worked in these three authorities over a two year period working with a total of 35 schools for a full school year, examining the concerns which they had about possible abuse to children, the progress of any referrals which they made and the perspectives of teachers, social workers and managers. In addition the paper will draw on the results of a recent survey of senior managers with responsibility for child protection in Local Education Authorities (LEAs) (Baginsky, 2003a).

The Children Act (1989) is the most significant piece of current legislation which relates to the welfare and protection of children. It set out to provide a balance between family support for children in need and the more investigative child protection approaches, and "made an explicit attempt to provide, in legislative terms, a thoroughly integrated set of responses". (Parton, 2002) It set the framework for providing a continuum of services for children in need, including (but not exclusively for) children at risk of, or suffering, significant harm.

The Act did not regard services for children in need as the sole responsibility of social services but of the local authority as a whole. It established the principles for what has become a major discourse within child protection and that is the refocusing of child

protection work away from what is sometimes referred to as a 'forensic' or 'investigative approach' to one which is more holistic and needs led. It is a trend which is evident in the USA, Australia and a number of other countries. Child protection agencies are struggling to cope with the ever increasing number of referrals of alleged child abuse cases. The message in the UK, and in other countries as well, is that a significant proportion of these referrals are mislabelled as maltreatment and instead they should be treated as requests for help to support families struggling to overcome a range of difficulties. In the UK context the investigative approach reflects the system which had been put in place after a number of public inquiries into the deaths of children at the hands of their parents and other carers. It was based on identifying and investigating children who may be at risk in order to put a protection plan in place for those at most risk. But it came in for criticism because it was seen to provide a high level of inter-agency co-operation only when there was a crisis; it was also accused of allowing professionals to intervene in the lives of too many families who would have benefited from support rather than sanction. The Children Act (1989) attempted to address this by introducing the concept of the 'child in need' to whom services would be offered in order to prevent impairment of their health and development. Abused children became 'children in need of protection from harm'.

Although the legislation emphasised the importance of all agencies working with parents to promote the welfare of children, a report from the Audit Commission in 1994 (Audit Commission, 1994) criticised local authorities for failing to develop services for 'children in need'. It urged the use of risk assessment systems to target interventions more effectively on the most serious cases and release resources which would enable the development of support services in the community. Within a year of this report twenty research studies were summarised in *Messages from Research* (Department of Health, 1995) and they also found that little progress had been made in achieving a more needs-led, family support based approach to child protection. These reports were the result of a Department of Health initiated programme of research which had commenced in the late 1980s and been completed in the early1990s. The Children Act had barely been introduced let alone had a chance to be effective. However, in the years since then research on the implementation and effectiveness of the Children Act has consistently reported the difficulties which authorities are having in shifting to an approach which emphasised responding to

children in need and not to concentrating resources on child protection investigations. Aldgate (1994) identified this as the difficulty they faced in "(changing) their mind sets from identifying risk of commission of abuse or neglect to identifying the impact of that abuse or neglect on children's development".

Aldgate and Tunstill (1994) had found that social services departments employed narrow definitions of 'children in need' which acted to exclude many children disadvantaged through circumstances. The reality is that the resources are not always there to respond to these children and sometimes things go badly wrong in relation to those most at risk.

At the time of writing this paper the future direction of child protection is once again being determined in the light of a major inquiry into the death of a child. The inquiry was led by Lord Laming who identified 12 occasions when Victoria Climbié could have been saved, but she was let down by lapses of communication between social workers, police and health officials. It was a very disturbing case and the inquiry's report repeated the message which has been heard so often, that better co-ordination and co-operation between services might have saved a child's life. The report highlighted shortcomings and made a total of 108 recommendations. Speaking at a conference in March 2003, Lord Laming said that all the time, in the course of the Climbié inquiry, he had heard evidence of redesignation of cases to children in need and that, in his opinion, the Children Act was never intended to be interpreted in this way.[i]

Lord Laming regards the Children Act as being basically sound but that major problems lie in how it is interpreted, reflecting "a yawning gap between Parliamentary intention and what is delivered" with the result that there has been a concentration on child protection because decisions are not taken in the wider context. In the Climbié case and others the system failed altogether.

Whilst the stated policy is a continued commitment to refocusing child protection in order to produce a better balance between supportive and protective services, the reality is that a great deal of social workers' time is still spent on risk assessments, investigations and monitoring children thought to be 'at risk of abuse', even though

the number of actual registrations on child protection registers has fallen. Directors of social services agree that too many families continue to be drawn down the child protection route but refocusing depends on additional resources to develop an appropriate range of family support.

Various proposals have been made by statutory and voluntary agencies, as well as by other institutions, for alternative structures and approaches. The government's response will be contained in a Green Paper " on children at risk which will set out measures to reduce educational underachievement, youth offending, antisocial behaviour, teenage pregnancy and ill health. The document will focus on the identification, referral and tracking of children at risk and the provision of mainstream and specialist services to them. The stated aim is to break down barriers between local authority departments and promote joint working between health, education and social care services.

At the same time the government has announced plans to set up Children's Trusts to improve collaboration between agencies. It is expected that the trusts will take over responsibility for child protection, family support, children in care, paediatrics, speech and language therapy, disability and exclusions from school, although it is not proposed to set a single model for Children's Trusts. Ministers are debating whether there should also be a national child protection agency controlling all aspects of children's welfare including support for families. Some of these structures are reminiscent of those proposed some 15 years ago in the wake of another major inquiry (Cleveland, 1988). The result may be a fundamental reform of the child protection system when what may be needed is a commitment and the wherewithal to make the one that exists more effective. But at the present time there is not only confusion over the future but confusion over the present, with the introduction of a plethora of initiatives such as Sure Start and the Children's Fund. So it is both timely and appropriate to examine the potential of and limitations on collaboration. Aspects of what follows may be extrapolated to relationships between other agencies, but the focus in this paper is on the relationship between schools and social services.

Co-ordination of, and co-operation over, the safeguarding of children is a feature of many countries' social support systems. It is assumed that a co-ordinated response to

a suspected case of child abuse is both necessary and desirable. One of the main justifications is in terms of making the system in place safer, by involving more individuals in responding appropriately to children and reporting causes for concern. Hence the role of the school. At a very basic level if services are not co-ordinated, if agencies are not aware of others involved with a child or family, if they fail to pass on information or make a judgement that someone else is responsible, a child may be put at risk.

There is no doubt that joined up thinking is required in response to the complexity of social problems facing public services. Central to this is the emphasis on multi-agency working and a recognition that social problems are not coterminous with professional boundaries. As far as children are concerned it is obvious that a single agency cannot meet all the needs of children and their families; rather they must work together to provide both the range and quality of services required. This lies behind the proposals to establish Children's Trusts and the suggestion of a single agency to deal with child protection. The refocusing of children's services is dependent on the ability to recognise the sometimes fine line between prevention and protection and the identification of children in need rather than children at risk. In terms of a response to an individual child in need of protection or support, refocusing demands a plan which will ensure that the right balance is being achieved between child protection and family support which is based on a multi-agency policy. But it also requires:

a) a shared definition and understanding across agencies on the refocusing strategy which is adopted
b) all agencies work together more effectively at both strategic and operational levels.

In multi-disciplinary work, collaboration is essential. It is not going to work in an atmosphere of professional possessiveness or competition or where there is a failure to have a shared perspective and definition. History has shown that poor communication and co-operation leads to failures in the identification of child abuse and protection.

Hallett and Birchall (1992) contended that a belief in a co-ordinated response to child protection was often " asserted rather than demonstrated and was taken to be self-evident." Various researchers (for example Jones et al., 1987, and Dale et al., 1986) have detailed the problems which get in the way . Shane (1982) explored the reasons why co-operation does not always work and concluded that it came down to lack of trust between agencies and / or professionals working in those agencies, professional 'turfism', power struggles between agencies, conflicts of interest, and the failure to provide the necessary resources to support co-operation. Some ten years later Hallett and Birchall (1992) summarised these as:

...different professional perspectives and frames of reference about the nature of child abuse and of intervention, different agency mandates and operational priorities or organisational tendencies towards autonomy, the time and other resource costs of collaborative work and interpersonal difficulties of trust and openness, gender and status differentials.

Over a decade later the situation has not changed significantly despite increased attention from policy makers, academics and politicians. It takes time to develop and sustain collaboration. Collaboration does not happen because it is considered to be a good thing and not because minimal structures are established to ease its passage. Kanter (1994) argues that collaboration is achieved when organisations "develop mechanisms – structures, processes and skills – for bridging organisational and interpersonal differences", and arrive at outcomes that they value. Kanter's emphasis on both organisational and individual actors is important because collaborative activity is undertaken by individuals within an organisational environment. The success of collaborative effort depends on both individuals and their organisations. Organisational structures and processes are important for the development of collaborative activity, as are the skills of the individuals who make it all happen. There will also be a tension between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to change and probably between the needs of central authorities and of local agencies. However, if schools and social services are to work collaboratively, a firm, co-

ordinated commitment has to be evident at three levels:

- National government
- Local government / local authorities
- Service delivery.

The role of national government

Inter-agency collaboration in relation to child protection has been directed by central government. A series of guidance documents have appeared culminating in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health et al., 1999). This document , like its predecessor *Working Together Under the Children Act, 1989* (Home Office et al., 1991), sets out how all agencies and professionals should work together to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect. It is addressed to those who work in the health and education services, the police, social services, the probation service, and others whose work brings them into contact with children and families. But it then has to be acted upon. In one report on the operation of the Children Act the Department of Health commented that:

Some authorities are finding it difficult to move from a reactive social policing role to a more proactive partnership approach. (Department of Health, 1994)

Henneman (1995) examine the influence of government directives on the development of collaboration. One of their conclusions is the extent to which lack of a coherent direction from government can undermine it. This surely extends to a failure to co-ordinate policies, give firm and unambiguous messages, communicate a vision, and provide appropriate resources. As far as child protection is concerned governments over the years have shown partial commitment to each of these areas, and have produced guidance such as that referenced above, but too often the policies and messages have been open to interpretation. Furthermore, whilst Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) were the co-ordinating bodies for child protection in local authorities they have not had statutory powers. This was part of the prevailing political ideology which rested on a mixed welfare economy, establishing safety nets for those most in need but otherwise encouraging individuals to take responsibility for

themselves. At a time when the Children Act (1989) had been designed to take account of a spectrum of need, the dominant political culture would not have been sympathetic to the establishment of such an infrastructure (Smith, 1991). This goes a long way to explain why the services were not there to see the implementation of the spirit of the Act, an omission which has had lasting repercussions.

There has also been a fundamental failure to provide a clear definition of abuse. A child protection intervention is based on a decision of what constitutes 'significant harm'. In turn that appears to be determined by the threshold for action which is decided locally and, in practice, it is a pragmatic response to the available resources. There is similar problem with the term 'family support'. Again the definition is problematic and there is no single one which can be taken as standard within social welfare policy and practice. According to Gardner (2003) there are:

...two elements, prevention of damage and promotion of strengths (which) *feature in more or less equal balance of what family support is intended to achieve.*

Clear definitions which were understood across professional boundaries would be welcome. At the present time their absence serves to aggravate professional relationships, and the effect of this is explored later in this paper.

Over the past twenty years schools are one of the agencies which have been drawn more formally into the processes established to protect children. Mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse is not a feature of the system which exists in the United Kingdom, although we do have what could be termed a quasi- mandatory system in place and this in the process of being tightened – a point which will be returned to later in this paper. Change has been brought about by guidance issued by the government. Schools, for example, have been expected to have a teacher in the school who is responsible for child protection and for liaison with social services. Some authorities had been providing training and establishing policies and procedures for their own work in this area, as well as that of schools, while others were finding it more difficult. In the middle of the 1990s GEST (Grants for Education Support and Training) funding was made available to support the training of these designated teachers and a revised government circular encouraged schools to realise the

importance of their role in the protection of children. (Department for Education and Employment, 1995)

By the late 1990s the overwhelming majority of designated teachers had received some training but since then there has been no specified funding for training in relation to child protection. GEST funding was replaced by the Standards Fund, which is a collection of specific grants enabling schools and LEAs to achieve improvement in educational standards set out in agreed targets. The grants are paid to LEAs who are required to devolve most of the money to their schools. Almost all Standard Fund grants are allocated to LEAs on a formula basis and the Government expects LEAs to devolve grants to schools by a fair formula, in which case schools should not have to apply for grants. But the consequence is that because LEAs no longer hold on to the funds they are not able to plan courses in the sure knowledge that schools will send teachers.

Another significant development has been Section 175 of the *Education Act* (2002) which received Royal Assent in July 2002 and requires that:

(1) A local education authority shall make arrangements for ensuring that the functions conferred on them in their capacity as a local education authority are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
(2) The governing body of a maintained school shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the school are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school.

This legislative change caused a great deal of concern amongst teachers and their professional representatives who feared individuals could be held to account for failing to recognise or report a child who was subsequently found to have been abused. The impetus for the amendment had been the death of a school-aged child at the hands of her step-mother, where social services, health and education had failed to act appropriately on their concerns. The implication may be that the school was more culpable than other agencies but the inquiry report did not reach that conclusion. This LEA officer summed up many of the reservations expressed by both those who

welcomed the legislation and those who did not:

> *Given the detailed DfES* (Department for Education and Skills) *guidance on this for schools and the fact that an Ofsted*[11] *inspection criteria includes the school's child-protection function I think this new add-on requirement is some sort of political knee-jerk reaction. It may be the national playing out of the local problem that sees the tensions between child-protection professionals and performance problems projected onto the child-protection amateurs such as schools and other groups. It also means nothing until the detailed guidance behind it is available. It's a very general statement as it stands. Any change would best wait to fit in with the post Climbié developments. None of this is to underestimate the crucial role of schools in child welfare but given the need for working together at all times in this area I don't think changing one agency's role on its own is very productive. The most useful immediate thing that could be done to support children's welfare in schools would be provision of a ring fenced budget to pay for supply cover whilst teachers trained in child protection or attended conferences.* (Senior Officer with Responsibility for Child Protection, quoted in Baginsky 2003a)

There were many unanswered questions, not least of which was what 'safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children' actually meant. *Safeguarding Children: A Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health, 2002) pointed out the term *safeguarding* had not been defined in law or government guidance. Instead it had evolved from the initial concern about children and young people in public care to include the protection from harm of all children and young people and to cover all agencies working with children and their families. The Inspectors interpreted the term to mean:

> *all agencies working with children, young people and their families take all reasonable measures to ensure that the risks of harm to children's welfare are*

minimised;

and

> *where there are concerns about children and young people's welfare, all agencies take all appropriate actions to address those concerns, working to agreed local policies and procedures in full partnership with other local agencies.*

The DfES must now issue clear guidance written in consultation with experienced LEA and school personnel. A code of practice or a set of minimum standards is needed to underpin the amendment. This would raise the awareness of both schools and authorities to their duties under the legislation and help monitor how they were responding. But very little will be achieved within current budgets. Earmarked funding, to support training and supply costs, is essential. It is hoped that the resources mentioned when the draft bill was under discussion will materialise.

A further area where the DfEE sought to influence child protection practice was contained in a new national curriculum for initial teacher training, introduced in the late 1990s, where one standard specifically required courses to ensure that their newly qualified teachers were able to:

> *...demonstrate that they have a working knowledge and understanding of teachers' legal liabilities and responsibilities relating to the role of the education service in protecting children from abuse.* (DfEE, 1998)

As welcome as this was, courses regretted that it was not accompanied by any guidance. This requirement has now disappeared from the latest draft of the required curriculum, although courses must still alert students to their professional responsibilities and clearly child protection is one of these. A survey of teacher training courses (Baginsky, forthcoming) shows that in reality most courses are offering short courses on the subject but they are facing two challenges - how to find more time and how to be sure about what should be included. A parallel survey of newly qualified teachers (Baginsky, 2003b)shows that they were firmly committed to the idea of teachers having a role in the child protection process. Not surprisingly those who had some child protection training were more confident in dealing with

concerns when they arose and just over half of the respondents had dealt with a child protection case in the very early years of their career. Although the majority of those responding to this survey had received some relevant training while they were students the importance of providing good quality training on ITT courses is underlined by the fact that only a third had received some training on child protection since they started teaching. Thirteen per cent of respondents had not had any child protection training before or after qualification. Responsibility for teacher training rests with the Teacher Training Agency, a section of the DfES, and it is to be hoped that with the implementation of the amendment the two parts of the one department will co-ordinate a training plan.

The decade that followed the appearance of the Children Act (1989) was one of almost constant change and re-organisation within the public sector. This has been particularly the case in education and social services, and it has been accompanied by devolution of budgets, the contracting out of services and exacting measures of accountability and audit imposed on both professions. There has also been an undermining of the professionalism of those working in both these agencies. All this has served to produce competition and suspicion within and between agencies, as well as an atmosphere of uncertainty. While some have identified this as an inevitable part of the changing economic and social scene, or as a reflection of post-modern, post-industrial society they are not the conditions which support collaboration and partnership.

There have also been omissions on the part of central government which have aggravated the situation. In recent years the Department of Education and Employment (subsequently the Department for Education and Skills) was a signatory to two key documents, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health et al.,1999) which is described above and the *Framework for Assessment* [iv](Department for Health et al., 2000). But the Department did not then issue circulars to schools to inform them of the implications of these documents. The result was that the awareness of schools about the *Framework* and its implications varied enormously round the country (See Baginsky, 2003a). This is an issue to which the paper will return in relation to its effect on local authorities but as far as the introduction of the

Framework is concerned, the main problem is that schools have been dependent on the formal and informal training available from the other services with which they work, and in some cases from their LEAs, because there was no guidance or support for training from the Department. It is incumbent on departments of central government to notify those for whom they have responsibility about major initiatives they have signed up to.

It is also important to communicate a consistent message. The Audit Commission Report, *Seen But Not Heard* (Audit Commission, 1994), criticised local authorities for spending too much on child protection investigation, and not enough on prevention. Yet the performance indicators for evaluating child protection by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) are based on Guidance on Investigation Procedures. The commission, which carries out joint reviews of social services with the SSI, warned that performance indicators failed to provide a clear picture of some of the most important aspects of child protection. As Gardner (2003) reasons:

On the one hand, Quality Protects[v] is widely interpreted as a message that local authorities' 'core business' is with children already in need of protection and looked after, and that prevention is the stuff of centrally led government initiatives; on the other hand the Children Act Part 111 gives social services a legal mandate for early intervention with children and families in need, backed by research and audit findings.

These contradictory messages emanate from the same department. It is absolutely essential, if it is to take place at a local level, that co-ordination should be replicated at central government level.

The role of local authorities

An examination of the role of local government also has to begin with the Children Act 1989, which acknowledged that public childcare is a responsibility not just of social services departments, but of the whole local authority. Local authority social services departments are subject to specific statutory duties: to investigate reports of children suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm and to take appropriate action to safeguard or promote children's welfare. The duty of the constituent parts of local

authorities, including local education authorities, to co-operate to support children and families is set out in Section 27 of the Children Act, 1989.

However, a co-ordinated approach by agencies to their responsibilities under the Act would have been easier if they had been experiencing a period of relative stability. This was not the case. The changes experienced throughout the public sector over recent years have been particularly acute, not least in the education sector. The period since the Children Act 1989 has coincided with a massive re-organisation of the education system in England and Wales. Not only was a National Curriculum introduced for five to 16 year olds, it was accompanied by additional national testing, school league tables and inspection. Teachers were faced with massive in-service programmes to meet the demands of the National Curriculum. Changes to the national examinations taken by 16 year olds and the General Certificate of Education further increased the workload of, and pressures on, teachers in secondary schools. In addition to the changes in the classroom there were also fundamental changes to the ways in which schools were financed and organised. The introduction of local management of schools, the short-lived grant maintained schools and the devolution of budgets increased the fragmentation of the educational services. A situation emerged where schools were increasingly subject to market forces and increased competition for pupils, especially those who were seen to carry a higher chance of academic success and a lower risk of needing additional resources or support.

The effect was to reduce the power of local education authorities at the time when they were being regarded as a key agency in a multi- agency approach to child protection and expected to play a leading role in their ACPCs. The impact of this should not be underestimated as it would naturally fall to LEAs to provide and monitor training as well as establish support and advice systems. But with diminishing powers local authorities have been placed in an unenviable role where they are judged by Ofsted on how successful they are in fulfilling this role without having the ability to compel schools to use their services. (See Baginsky, 2003 a)

The 1990s was also a period of re-organisation and restructuring in social service departments throughout England, sometimes as a result of the wishes of newly appointed managers, sometimes because of staffing and financial crises and

sometimes as a consequence of various initiatives. Despite restructuring, the central problems of lack of resources, a shortage of qualified social workers, and high caseloads usually remained. Evidence presented to the inquiry into Victoria Climbié's death revealed how restructuring of the authority's social services in 1999 undermined effective child protection practice. In her evidence to the Inquiry one social worker said that this may have been the major factor in Victoria's death.

All three authorities where the qualitative study took place had experienced various levels of reorganisation, and the LEAs in the two cities had been subject to particularly critical inspection reports from Ofsted. There had then been a period of review, changes in senior management and, particularly in one authority, damage to staff morale and confidence. Social services in both cities were also struggling to reach acceptable standards, while under a great deal of pressure to respond to increasing demands and adjust to re-organisations. They were both experiencing high levels of staff shortages at all levels with a consequent loss of expertise. The SSI's report on City A actually called for "...a period of management stability to ensure consolidation of changes to date and to ensure the direction of change was maintained".

Some authorities have, however, embarked on ambitious mergers. Over one third of councils have reconfigured their social services departments, linking social services with other departments (although evaluations of the impact of this are still awaited). But this still leaves the majority as independent operators. The county council area in this study had merged education and social services into one service. Four multi-professional local teams brought together staff from social services and education The stated intention was to have one department focusing on the needs of the child, with increased capacity and ability to do preventative work. In the words of a senior officer in that authority:

It is about preventative work – encouraging a holistic approach to a child rather than a one-perspective approach. Some work looking at families of schools and how to link discussions about child protection, attendance etc.

The merger happened towards the end of the study, although the planning was obviously happening throughout the time of the research. When schools first became aware of the proposal they envisaged a closer liaison with individual social workers, assuming that the two services would merge administratively and geographically. In the event, managers of the service, together with some other professionals, moved in together while rationalisation of social work teams actually made them more remote from many of the schools which they served. But throughout the run-up to the process schools did not have a clear picture about the changes that would occur. There were meetings for head teachers but the impression of these senior social workers was that schools did not want to get engaged in the process:

They don't know, they don't want to know about the (new) Service and what is happening. They have been invited to meetings but they just disengage. I think they have got so much else to do. It is a disappointment but when the Service is a reality we shall have to try hard to encourage them.

I don't think they (schools) *see themselves as part of it. But if you are sitting with other professionals hopefully it will have an impact. If you are with the person doing the statementing for a looked after child you have responsibility for that and it should join up.*

This was not the picture gained from talking to head teachers and teachers. These head teachers were typical of those seen across the schools in this authority. While welcoming the concept they were cautious about expecting too much too soon:

I am a member of the primary heads forum and I have asked everyone from there and from the powers that be and no one seems to have any answers or they are not allowed to tell us. Everyone just says that "we should see a smoother service" or "we'll have different hats on". Social services should have a better handle on it. Three line whips have been on social workers to attend workshops. That was not the case for education. The implications have never been made clear to us. I went to one of the workshops and I was completely confused and I was not the only one.

I think we are all a bit cynical about it, but I think the general impression is that when the teething problems are out of the way it could be amazing, a revelation, the concept is on totally the right line. However, the teething problems are so large and I do not think that the initial problems have been sorted out, like the merging of staff.

It is interesting that interviews and contacts with practising social workers indicated that they did not think it was going to make any difference to them at all, while at least there was an optimism in schools that improvements would follow after the new *structures had settled in. But a year later this had disappeared,* at least in relation to child protection:

At the moment it is not an improvement on the old system as you don't have direct access, immediate access to a duty officer unless you actually press for it. You have to sound desperate, I think, before they put you through to a duty officer. I don't find that very comfortable. (Head teacher)

It may be working in bringing the managers together but we need to work together with children and families and there has not been any difference in the support or contact we have had from social workers. That has to be the measure! (Designated teacher)

The views were confirmed by a manager in social services:

The vision was they would send the referral in and they would have this multi-agency meeting and everyone would be able to work on it and it is not like that. (Senior social worker)

Looked at from the outside, but based on what teachers, social workers and others reported, there were obviously problems. Not every one had the same level of information, and value-laden perceptions of other professionals seemed to be as strong as ever. But there were additional factors. Although the intention had been to establish cross-professional teams where referrals would be jointly reviewed this was not happening. Social workers continued to complain that they were over-burdened and effectively acting as an 'old duty team'. In the part of the authority where the

research took place only half of the planned number of social workers in the team were in post. Across the authority they were surviving, like many teams across the UK, on social workers newly arrived from abroad, people who were trained but with little or no knowledge of the system they had entered.

As far as schools were concerned judgements on the new service were heavily influenced by their experience of a new call centre whereby all contact with the authority went through a central number. When it was introduced calls went to the general operator. If the key words 'child protection' were mentioned the call went straight to Client Services who took information about the child. The information was taken not by a social worker but someone trained in taking referrals. Subsequently, schools could contact Client Services directly but it was not always any quicker as Client Service personnel still had to take details of the case, so others were held in a queue.

Call centres were a feature of all three authorities and, although they operated in slightly different ways, the same complaints were levelled against all of them. The common factor was that at a time when the two services should have been drawn closer together the impersonal nature of call centres was seen as a wedge to prise them further apart. Teachers who had previously turned to social workers for help or advice now felt uncertain about whether they could do this. In some cases, particularly in the authority where the two departments had merged, the telephone numbers had changed; in other instances teachers tried, with various levels of success, to trace social workers with whom they had had previous contact. Similar situations emerged in the other authorities, but in one City the widespread concern about their call centre led at least one team manager to give her telephone number to designated teachers and encourage others to do so as well.

There were efforts to bridge the gap between professions. One of the authorities had appointed four child protection workers to support schools and offer training. They were responsible for providing guidance and advice to schools, designated teachers and child protection teams as well as for raising any concerns between social services and schools and representing education on the Child Protection Conference Team. The schools involved in this project made few references to these workers. One

reason for this may have been the fact that they would have been linked to someone who was on a temporary secondment so it perhaps not surprising that were a few comments about how schools were currently using him as a resource. But some designated teachers clearly respected the advice and support which he had provided in the past:

*(*He*) is very good he comes in and he talks to the teachers and it gives them someone else to ask questions of. As a head I think that they have a value in that relationships between education and social services have not and are not always very good, and I personally see (*him*) as a half way point and it is very useful.*

However, a few schools were linked to another worker, but they did not see her advice or support as being particularly useful, accessible or timely. It is not possible to generalise too much about these posts as there were at least two workers operating in parts of the authority not covered by this research. As welcome as designated posts were they did carry a quite high administrative load and were expected to attend all case conferences on school aged children in their area. It did seem, however, that more time should could have been devoted to supporting schools directly.

In City B there were regular meetings between the local social work teams and the designated teachers in their patch. Although these were not always well attended they were valued by those that did go because issues and practice could be discussed. At both education and social services management levels there was a high commitment to supporting this initiative, as well as to providing a programme of training at different levels and for different audiences. This was absent in City A. Although a very senior member of the education directorate had a good knowledge of, as well as experience in, child protection this was just one of many responsibilities. Previously there had been one member of his staff who had been responsible for child protection. She was highly regarded as was the training she had both organised and provided and the advice she had given. However, she had taken up another post, and schools were not formally told of the implications. In the year when the research was conducted the schools were not aware of any training being provided, they were not sure where to turn for advice and joint meetings with social services had not happened for some time.

The three authorities in this study approached their responsibilities in very different ways and this was especially apparent in relation to the introduction of the *Framework for Assessment*. City A had provided no training for schools on the *Framework*, the County Council dealt with it in after-school briefing sessions for designated teachers where attendance was optional and usually not very good, while City B provided dedicated multi-agency training for schools . In City A the Head of Child Protection said:

Social workers had to be trained as they had to deliver the assessments on time... In Health there has been a lot of training, but there has not been any in schools as far as I am aware. I am not sure how they make sense of assessments

There was a misplaced faith in the county council area that what had been provided amounted to training when observation of the sessions showed that this was not the case. The third authority, City B, acknowledged that too few designated teachers had attended the training but there was a clear appreciation that schools needed to be trained in procedures if they were to play a full role in protecting children:

The other thing is training, I do not think that schools are very well represented at the multi-agency training on the assessment framework, so how could they cope with a whole change in procedures? I think there should have been a three line whip that someone from the schools be there and feedback to the school. But who has the authority to issue it?

A similar range of practice was evident across the country (Baginsky, 2003a). In examining the material sent by local authorities to the author it was apparent that some documents gave schools very clear guidance about the procedures under *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and the *Framework for Assessment*, particularly in relation to circumstances where parental consent to a referral should be gained. Other guidance was less than clear and some positively confusing. Neither was there always consistency in the advice given out by LEAs or ACPCs.

There is a need for clear guidelines to schools on when to approach parents for consent prior to making a referral to Social Services.[vi] Although professionals should usually discuss any concerns with parents or carers, and where possible seek their agreement to make referrals to social services, this should be done only where such discussions would not place a child at increased risk of significant harm. *Safeguarding Children: A Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements for Safeguarding Children (*Department of Health, 2002*)* commented on the confusion they had found in agencies over responsibilities and duties to share information about child welfare concerns with other agencies, and were not confident about whether other agencies shared information with them. It refers to the findings of inquiries where there had been serious weaknesses and failings in information sharing, but the inspectors had found very few formal agreements between agencies about how and when information should be shared. *Safeguarding Children: A Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health, 2002) recommended that the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office and Department of Health should ensure that there is clear guidance provided to all agencies under their respective responsibilities on the implications of the *Data Protection Act* (1998) and the *Human Rights Act* (1998) and other relevant law, in respect of sharing information about children where there are welfare concerns.

On a broader level there is considerable variation across the country on the extent to which senior managers in the key agencies attempt to co-ordinate practice over child protection. Hallett (1995) explains the problem in terms of organisational theory, suggesting that agencies would want to preserve their own autonomy, and the change to a more collaborative approach would be costly in terms of money, effort and morale. What has not been achievable through pragmatism and exhortation is now being approached through audit and inspection. In general, while the inspection reports indicate that the relationships between local education authorities and social services are reasonably good and improving, it is rarely possible to attach these judgements to appropriate measures nor are they reflected in schools' views on their local social work teams (Baginsky, 2003a).

Social services will be seen as the lead body, so while other agencies may be willing to co-operate they would not automatically take a great deal of responsibility. This

may be the result of a range of factors but foremost will be perceptions, expertise and knowledge. This would seem to make sense in relation to real concerns about a child's safety, but there would seem to be a more significant role for schools in relation to supporting children and families in need. It is part of what they already do but it could be extended. At present there is little time for teachers to be involved in this and few resources to support the work. It would require some element of local co-ordination and support which is usually absent. At a very basic level the support services available in an area should be mapped and the information passed on to schools, alongside details of who is able to access them and under what circumstances. In City B there was a higher awareness than in the other authorities of the support that may be available to families and more information about local services seemed to be available to schools, but it was still not evident in all the schools involved in the research. Nevertheless, it was significantly higher than in any schools in City A or in the county council area, and there was a greater willingness to be proactive in securing such support. The schools referred to city-wide initiatives and programmes and, although they were not always confident of specific briefs, they often knew how to obtain further information.

The past decade has been a particularly difficult time for local authorities, but the fact that some areas have managed to support their front line services to a greater extent than others does mean that there are examples of good practice to describe and disseminate. Those authorities which have not managed to do as much perhaps need more encouragement than chastisement.

The role of teachers and social workers

Much of the literature emerging from the USA in the past three decades supported a view that teachers had not effectively engaged in the formal child protection processes (see, for example, Pelcovitz, 1980). To a lesser extent this was reflected in the UK (Birchall and Hallett, 1995). It does seem as if teachers may be beginning to shun the image of belonging to a profession which had nos effectively engaged in this work (see Baginsky, 2000 and Baginsky, 2003a), but how realistic is it to expect teachers and social workers to work collaboratively in present circumstances?

According to Cadbury (1993) collaboration is a process where power to influence a problem is shared equally. Although both schools and social service teams have what could be viewed as 'equal' importance, and may even receive a similar level of resources, they operate within distinct domains with few, if any, resources to support joint activity. The reality is that they do not have equal responsibility for decision making or case management in child protection. Schools are anxious to play a role in child protection but there were very few examples in this research where this extended beyond a responsibility to refer, report and attend meetings convened by social services.

One reason for this lies in the differences between professionals in conceptualisation, culture and conditions of work. Barrett-Kruse et al. (1998) found that teachers' decisions to intervene to protect children conflicted with child protection services response to suspected abuse and produced helplessness and frustration for the teacher. In a project where she examined the source of referrals in relation to outcomes di Leonardi (1980) found that referrals from doctors and the police were more likely to receive attention than those from schools and elsewhere. Gibbons et al. (1995) also found that the origin of referrals correlated with different substantiation rates. The main irritants in the relationship between schools and social workers were the perceived reluctance of social workers to accept a child protection referral without a great deal of evidence and the failure of social workers to maintain contact with teachers.

It was pointed out earlier that a key component of a collaborative relationship is a shared definition, in this case of abuse. There is no consistent definition of abuse. A child protection intervention is based on a decision of what constitutes 'significant harm'. The threshold is not fixed or even transparent. Thresholds are the key determinants of the responses which will be made, but they were rarely if ever mentioned in the schools involved in this research. They certainly did not feature as part of the normal decision making process about making a referral. Of course best practice would lead to an assessment on every referral but resources will not stretch to that, so senior managers have to decide which will be followed up. The irony was that social workers complained that schools did not pass on concerns about children quickly enough or in explicit enough terms, while schools made complaints about

cases where nothing seemed to have happened to their referrals. The Laming report identified the difficulties which arise when a case fails to trigger a Section 47 enquiry. There is then no duty on other agencies to share information and Lord Laming argues for the provision of guidance on the sharing of information where parental consent has been withheld. These cases gave schools great concern because in their judgement the child was still at risk of harm even if the evidence had not been secured. Sometimes a fog of secrecy develops. If a way could be found to bring all that remains hidden at present out into the open, not only would inter-agency work be enhanced but so would the professionalism of those involved.

However, Pelcovitz (1980) found that teachers had a theoretical definition of abuse and neglect which was narrower than that employed by other agencies. This might go part of the way to account for Zellman and Antler's (1990) finding that child protection services complained of over-reporting by teachers. It would be wrong to look for too simplistic a relationship between training and reporting. It is true that King et al. (1998) found that the amount of training on child protection was one of the strongest predictors of reporting, a finding recently supported to some extent in the UK (Baginsky, 2003b) where newly qualified teachers expressed significantly higher levels of confidence in relation to child protection where they have had training, especially if this was post-qualification. However, despite the numerous training programmes run for teachers and other professionals, very little attention has been paid to what constitutes effective training, although research indicates that this involves moving beyond the basic approach to indicators and procedures. (McCallum and Baginsky, 2001)

Kesner and Robinson (2002) examined the characteristics of alleged and substantiated child maltreatment reports made by the four mandated reporters in the US, namely education, legal, medical and social services staff. They used data from the 1997 National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems (NCANDS) data set. Teachers reported 25 per cent of the cases of suspected abuse and had a substantiation rate of 56 per cent, the lowest of all mandated reporters except for legal personnel. Kesner and Robinson speculate that teachers may be making more referrals that rest on weaker evidence than other reporters or that child protection services may be investigating fewer reports emanating from schools. This would go part of the way to

explaining the frustrations experienced by teachers and social workers when reports are not acted on or when schools are seen to over–report. Kesner and Robinson go on to suggest that teachers may, in fact, be under-reporting those forms of abuse which present more ambiguous evidence. They conclude that whether teachers are making unfounded reports or overlooking some forms of abuse, they need more sophisticated training. Again this reflects findings from the UK, although colleges and employers argue that finding the time and resources to do so is a problem. (Baginsky, forthcoming)

It is not possible to divorce the decision to report from perceptions and definitions of abuse or need. Training in child protection is often dominated by an examination of indicators of abuse and the steps which must be taken if there is a concern. In the USA, Besharov (1985) found that two-thirds of all allegations of abuse were determined to be unfounded and in the UK, for example, only seven per cent of referrals for physical abuse were confirmed as such. (Gibbons et al., 1995) But it is hardly surprising that schools may over-report if it is their understanding that having noticed an indicator which has given rise to a concern social services should be notified and will take action. Kesner and Robinson (2002) advocate the role of school social workers in supporting school staff to identify and understand abuse, as well as reporting and negotiating with the Child Protection Service and co-ordinating interventions with other agencies. This, they argue, would lead to a degree of uniformity in defining cases of abuse and in reporting by allowing the expertise of both social worker and teacher to come together. Despite any cultural differences or suspicions which exist between the professions there was almost unanimous agreement amongst schools in this study that the one thing which would improve practice in relation to safeguarding children would be ready access to a social worker whom they knew and who knew the school. This is one head teacher's comment and suggestion but similar requests were made by schools across the three authorities:

If we had here one or two social workers based in a secondary school, as they have more room, and working with the feeder primary school it would be a tremendous help. They would see education in a different light and we would see them in a different light as we would see each other working and what is going on. It would make referrals a lot easier if rather than making a referral without prior discussion

or discussing hypothetical cases with people you do not know in a call centre you could go and see them and talk to them, that is really what we want.

Very few schools in the UK have an attached social worker. The role of the Educational Social Worker has changed over the years and in most areas the main emphasis of the work of the service is on attendance. More attention is now being paid to the Full Service School model originating in the USA. The government has announced the establishment of over 200 'extended schools' - one-stop shops for schooling, family, health and community services – across England . It follows the 'Community Schools' initiative in Scotland where phase 1 of the pilot has involved 170 schools or institutions in 30 local authorities. Some projects are single schools but most are clusters of nursery, primary and secondary schools. This is being evaluated by researchers from the Institute of Education at London University. (For example, see Power, 2001) The research team has been quoted as saying that Interim findings suggest that:

Joint ways of working, bringing together education, health and social work in the delivery of services, have substantially increased following the start of new community school work. [vii]

Nevertheless it has proved somewhat difficult to achieve multi-agency working. They categorised the barriers to this as:

- ⇒ **structural** - such as the school timetable, holiday arrangements and line management structures
- ⇒ **cultural and attitudinal** - for example, dress codes and levels of formality
- ⇒ **professional** – as exemplified by confidentiality procedures. [viii]

Structural and professional issues did emerge as issues in this work. There were many unanswered questions, usually resting on very practical challenges. For example, how best to determine what information is shared across the two agencies, how to reconcile making and responding to telephone calls while having teaching responsibilities, and how to sustain professional relationships when there is a high

staff turnover? These and other issues will be explored in the full report. It is the 'cultural and attitudinal' aspects on which this paper will now concentrate.

A recent report argued that schools attempts to be inclusive and support children most in need are in danger of failing because of competitive cultures, targets and formal curriculum (Macrae et al., 2003). The authors questioned the viability of any government initiative aimed at halting the rate of primary school children being excluded from primary school unless agencies were able to work together more effectively. They found that the gap between the theory and practice of the different agencies impeded their ability to collaborate.

Previously, Loxley (1997) identified mistrust and suspicion as barriers to co-operation between professionals, while Cameron and Cranfield (1998) considered mutual understanding and respect as prerequisites for the development of collaborative partnerships. In this project, teachers and social workers expressed views about the other which ranged from generally liking those they met, through respect, and understanding, to deep antagonism. These views sometimes varied over time and were often, though not invariably, based on assessments of individuals rather than the profession or the service. Sometimes there had been considerable contact between individuals, usually leading to more positive feelings being expressed, but often because of staff turnover or decisions not to take any further action or the call centres described above, the contact was a one-off, brief or even only by telephone. While this reflected the realities of both professions it has implications for a system, if at least nominally based on inter-agency collaboration.

Even here there must be a note of caution. However warm the relationships between individuals the system cannot be sustained by that alone. Challis et al (1988) also found that personalities were a critical factor in the success or failure of inter-agency work and commented on the importance of informal professional relationships, so long as they went along side the more formal structures in child protection. But as Tomison (1996) contends :

Taken to extremes the tendency to rely on informal communication methods may lead to the variety of interagency communication problems identified by the author and

often by the workers themselves. That is, running a child protection network on an ad hoc basis may result in poor information sharing and at times the loss of cases through inter-professional 'gaps' in the system.

Collaboration can be threatened by a failure to acknowledge and address the importance of professional cultures. As Hudson et al., (1997) and Loxley, (1997) point out, unless these cultural differences are acknowledged and explored they will lead to misunderstandings which will destroy efforts to achieve effective collaboration. Clearly, education and social services have very different and distinct cultures. The perceptions of these cultures may not always be accurate. In this project some social workers described teachers as being interested in the class while they are interested in individuals or as concentrating on the child at the expense of the family. Conversely, some teachers, such as the one quoted here, saw social workers as failing to prioritise the needs of the child at an early stage in an attempt to hold the family together:

There are questions around the culture of social work which seems a bit navel gazing. There seems to be a lot of time spent on what is right for the worker and not necessarily for the client. They tolerate conditions for children which we know are damaging. Children should be with their families, but if there is not being cared for I don't think we should hang around to see if they come to even more harm. Social workers, and I think psychologists as well, mask the true level of needs in an area and do not speak out. That is the culture of their work.

Similar feelings were also encountered by Easen et al. (2000) in their work on inter-professional collaborative experiences in work with children and families. :

Headteachers spoke of the conflicts between themselves – with their desire for rapid solutions to the immediate problems of the individual child – and social workers with their expectation of working over a longer time scale with whole family units.

But cultural differences go way beyond these stereotypes and can contribute to entrenchment and further impediments to co-ordination. Armstrong et al. (1993) showed how pre-conceptions and expectations of the role of 'other' professionals

impinge on how they operate. This has been identified by Challis et al. (1988) as contributing to a view of stepping beyond 'one's autonomous zone of activity' as 'a dangerous move' and one where you 'lose control of the little bit you are able to determine'. But those in agencies studied by Challis et al. also commented on issues other than control, remarking on the strangeness of others, 'on their procedures and ways of working' as being 'not the same as ours'. These views were echoed by this head as she reflected on what she heard in her staff room:

However we are always negative about each other and slagging each other off and I do not think this has been addressed enough beforehand. (school in authority where education and social services merged). *I have been a head a long time and I have had to remind teachers that social workers are professionals too as they do not feel that they pull their weight. I have never been a fly on the wall in social services but I am sure they say the same things or that we should have notified them earlier or done x, y or z later. I am sure they see faults as well. There are times when we both need a reminder that we have to be tolerant. However the differences have always been there and I do not think they are going to disappear over night.*

The Joint Inspectors' report *Safeguarding Children: A Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health, 2002) in fact commented on the very negative views held by schools on their relationship with social services:

> *Relationships between senior Social Services and education staff, particularly within the Local Education Authority, were normally better than those between Social Services and school staff. Relationships between school staff and Social Services were sometimes unduly influenced by past experiences and personal contacts.*

There are disparities between the two types of staff in terms of vastly different conditions of service and ethos because of their training and which lead to problems of working together. They start off with very different assumptions so it is very difficult to dovetail them together. These need to be exposed and challenged in

training. There also needs to be time for reflection on what has worked or impeded progress in particular cases.

Across two of the three authorities, City A and the county council area, there was a perceptible divide between the two agencies for many of the reasons explored above; this was also obvious in some parts of City B, most clearly in the secondary schools which were involved. Although there were some positive aspects in City A and the county council there were few structures to sustain a collaborative ethos and a number of barriers to its development. The third authority was not immune from inter-agency tensions and setbacks, but there was a far more positive atmosphere than encountered in the other two areas. Again the reasons for this will be explored in the full report but a few of the more important ones should be recorded. There is a team of two workers within the education department responsible for dissemination, co-ordination and training in relation to child protection. They have worked very hard to develop relationships at ACPC level, as well as within the various levels of social services and across all their schools. The advice, support and training they provide is very highly regarded and based on a multi-agency approach. As a result of the team's work, as well as that of social work managers, meetings take place locally to bring teachers, social workers and other professionals together. These meetings provide the opportunity for additional training and discussion. They allow issues to be aired and solutions to problems to be suggested. In some cases the contact between agencies has kick started further joint work. One designated teacher became aware of the possibilities to affect change. The school gave her one day a week non-teaching time (in addition to the time which she may need to attend meetings and conferences) when she knows she can convene meetings of professionals and parents to discuss children causing concern and at least attempt a planned, preventative approach. The school is in an area of high social and economic deprivation and qualifies for access to a number of initiatives designed to counter social exclusion. The designated teacher recognises that the training she has received, together with the relationships with other professionals, particularly social workers, has given her the confidence to be more pro-active and to be able to identify and access available resources. Morrison (1999) quotes Glisson and Hemmelgarm's (1998) conclusion that, in their evaluation of the introduction of external service co-ordination teams in Tennessee, better outcomes for children were related not solely to co-ordination, but to those sites where

organisational climate and workers' attitudes and motivation were more positive. It is worth noting that although not immune to re-organisation it has been less marked than in City A or in the county council authority.

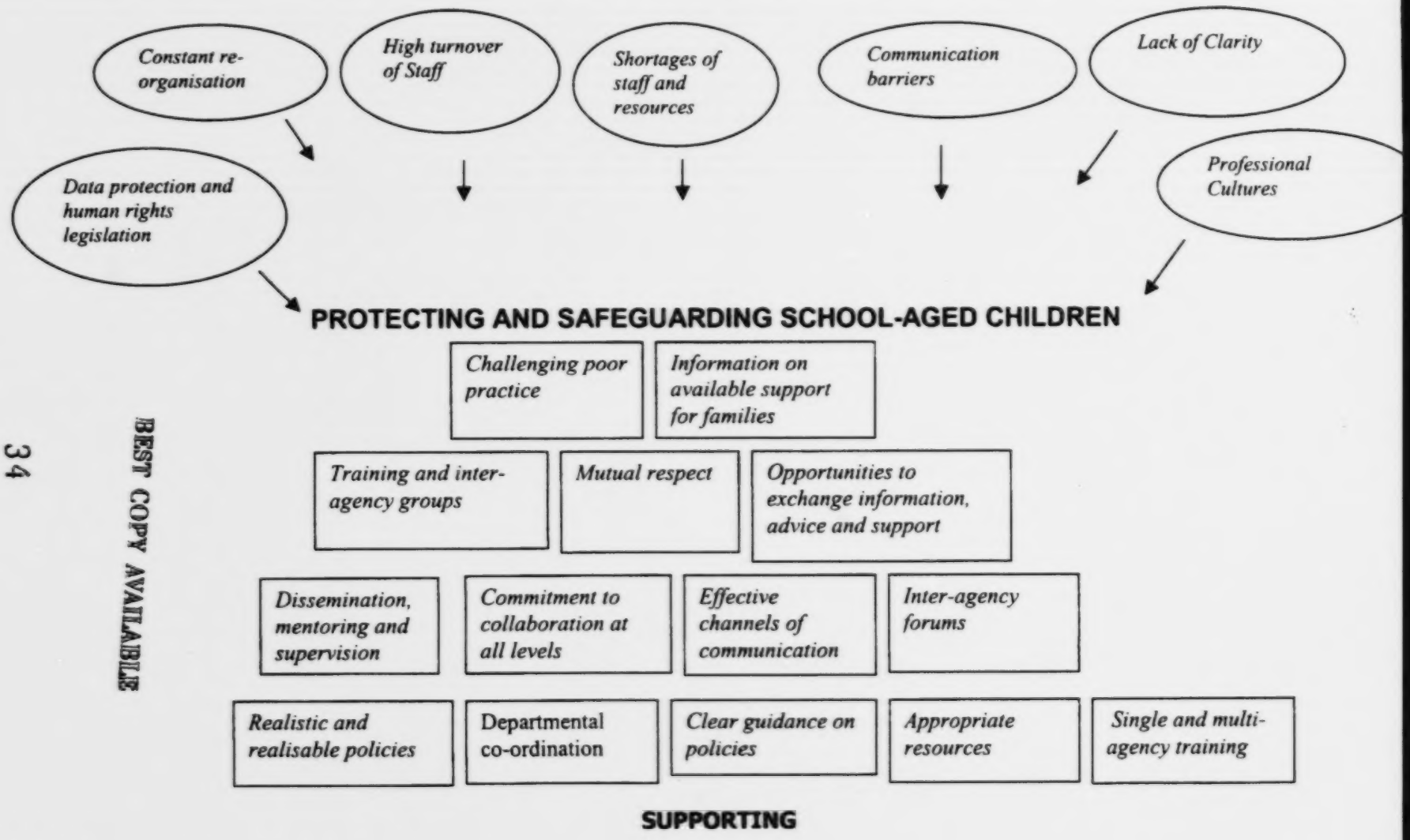
Model?

Originally it was intended to plot the relationships between schools and social services uncovered during the project against Howe's matrix of partnership (Howe, 1992), as adapted by Morrison (1999) where he examines the impact of different types of inter- and intra- agency cultures on service delivery and the capacity of agency and inter-agency systems to change to a more needs-led approach. However, given the complexity and the variety of these relationships there was the danger that this would have represented a vast over-simplification. The alternative approach has been to represent the child at the interface between schools and social services where the relationship is determined by the dynamics of an array of factors. The outcome is subject to constant shift because it is determined by the interaction of these factors, few of which are constant. **(See Fig. 1)**

Given the range of multi-level factors that contribute to collaboration and the significant hazards that may be encountered it is not possible to devise a formula which will work on all occasions. The intention should be to make sure as many supportive practices are in place and at a time when formal policies are falling short of implementation it makes sense to examine what front line workers are saying is effective or not.

In a few situations it was possible to see what the system could look like. But these also revealed the complexity and potential of 'joining up' services. They showed the investment needed in terms of finance, support, time and staff resources to develop ways of working collaboratively, while raising the level of organisational awareness. It reflected the conclusion drawn by Taket and White (2000) that the outcome of the multi-agency work cannot be a single, authoritative narrative defined largely from knowledge deriving from one discipline.

Fig. 1 Balancing factors supporting and countering collaboration between schools and social work teams



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Concluding discussion

The refocusing debate and subsequent efforts have been imposed on to a system that was not ready for it and the resources have not been there to support it. There is not a spectrum of services in every area which children and their families can move between. There has also been the unrealistic expectation that social workers would be able to support children defined as being 'in need' and the subsequent frustrations and disillusionment when they have been unable to do so. Overall it has served to complicate the relationship between schools and social services.

There also has to be a recognition that inter-agency arrangements do not always provide the optimum conditions for inter-professional collaboration. Local authorities have to balance the protection of a small number of children while improving the quality of life of a much larger number of children in need. The challenge is how to achieve this. It is vital that as well as recognising what has gone wrong good practice should be identified, described and disseminated.

It is not surprising that different professional groups will emphasise different parts of the child protection process and will have different roles. It is inevitable that social services will be seen as the lead agency in this work. But there is then the possibility that it may lead to some abdication of responsibility or there may be a failure to instil a feeling of 'collective ownership'. At the very least there needs to be a minimum standard in relation to child protection issues which should be enforced in the training of all professional groups but it needs to go further than this. McFarlane's (1996) solution is to make every aspect of the training truly inter-agency, from planning through to implementation (and presumably evaluation). But how realistic is this model in a climate of decentralisation and in the wake of a history of failure to establish a shared commitment? The commitment in the schools in this project to protecting and promoting the welfare of children was not in doubt, but other priorities may be competing which challenge this commitment and they may win out. In education the closer scrutiny of examination results and of schools in general, with the attendant judgements that result, means that the focus is on what has to be measured, not necessarily on what is important.

All agencies have been subject to national and local re-organisation. LEAs and social services have been experiencing what seems like permanent reorganisation. This serves to cause confusion. At the same time there is a multitude of initiatives, frequently unco-ordinated and regarded by many social workers as having diverted funds away from their service. The system is on hold at the moment as the Government's delayed Green Paper is expected. Once again it is an atmosphere of uncertainty that prevails.

If staff do not trust their own agency they are unlikely to be in a position to work collaboratively with other agencies. When services are under pressure inter-agency co-operation is not likely to be a priority. At a time when new solutions to the problem of how to protect children are being sought there has to be a recognition that whatever restructuring of child protection services takes place, the central problems of lack of resources, a shortage of qualified social workers, and caseloads that are too high will remain. Perhaps too much was expected from the Children Act and from the refocusing initiative. Despite the numerous research projects which have been concluded there has been a failure to examine what has to be in place to support collaboration between agencies generally, and schools and social services in particular, at the micro level. But it is at this level that key decisions are taken. If communication between agencies is leading to children being placed at risk and, in some cases, dying this reflects the fact that communication between individual workers is a problem. This leads to the obvious need to look at what is going wrong and mending it, not necessarily overturning the whole system.

Professor Olive Stevenson, speaking at an event organised to commemorate the **1948** Children's Act organised by Sussex University and East Sussex Social Services in October 1998, pointed out that remembering and commemorating the Act was crucial "not as an elderly knees up and trip down memory lane", but because there is a tendency now to "rush to and from immediate gimmicks for solving problems without much of a sense of history." The solution may rest with the Menkins and Stevensons of this world rather than with civil servants and policy makers.

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[i] Speaking at the Community Care / Pavilion Conference **After The Victoria Climbiè Inquiry**, London 28 March 2003
[ii] Green Papers are consultative documents.
[iii] Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)
[iv] The Framework for Assesment of Children in Need and their Families is intended 'to ensure that referral and assessment processes discriminate efetively between diferent types of levels of need and produce a timely service response'. (Department of Health, 2000)
[v] The Quality Protects programme is a key part of the Government's wider strategy for tackling social exclusion. It focuses on working with some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children in our society: those children looked after by councils, in

the child protection system, and other children in need. The programme requires that by 2004, local authorities must show that they are achieving a range of key performance targets and outcomes for children and young people.

[vi] The Department of Health is currently carrying out work on this issue

[vii] See http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/database/community.html

[viii] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/ic76-00.asp

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